Agency/Component: USDA

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2010 Hiring Reform Action Plan

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Hiring Reform Initiative:
1.   Eliminate written essay-style questions (KSAs) at the initial stage of the application process.

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Date:

Revised 09-09-10

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Describe the barrier, problem, or deficiency being addressed:
- KSA essays are encouraged (though not always required) except when an occupational questionnaire is used to assess applicants' qualifications. Some questionnaires request that applicants validate one or more answers with a narrative response.
- Lack of policy or written guidance that instructs components on the types of information that can and cannot be requested from applicants at the initial stage of the application process.
- Historically, HR staffs and hiring managers have relied heavily on KSA essays to determine basic qualifications and/or to identify the best-qualified candidates.
- Application and assessment procedures will have to be revised when the best-qualified candidates are identified using a cumulative hurdle approach.
- Current automated systems and application processes were not designed to request additional information from applicants after basic eligibility assessment.
- Need to communicate modified application process (es) to employees, HR staffs, hiring managers, unions in short time frame.
- The development of occupational questionnaires (as an alternative to KSA essays) can be resource-intensive. Components may need to re-direct more financial and/or staff resources to developing valid, reliable occupational questionnaires in order to facilitate the assessment process for some occupations.

Describe what is causing the barrier/problem (i.e., What is the root cause?):
- Limited information published by OPM on proper use of multiple phase assessment approaches (i.e., cumulative hurdle and successive hurdle approaches).
- If multi-phase approach is used, automated systems may have to be modified to solicit additional information from applicants after initial assessment for basic eligibility.
- Short time frame does not allow adequate time to develop and pilot multi-phase assessment process.

Define success or the desired outcome upon completion of action steps below:
- KSA essays and narrative responses to assessment questions are completely eliminated at the initial stage of the application process for all USDA job announcements.
- HR staffs and managers have adequate information to assess basic eligibility and identify the best-qualified candidates, without requesting KSA essays or other narrative responses at the initial phase of the application process.
- Publication of a written Departmental communication that clearly explains the expectations of this initiative to agency HR staffs, hiring managers, and employees, including how application processes and assessment methods will change.
- Components' use of a multiple phase assessment approach does not increase the average time-to-hire to more than 80 days.
- Revised application process and new assessment methods are developed, implemented, and fully understood by HR staffs, hiring managers,

- employees, and applicants.
- Occupational questionnaires, tools, and methods used to assess candidates are valid and defensible.
- Management Satisfaction Surveys show an increase in satisfaction with the quality of candidates referred and selected.

Primary Action Planning Team
  Lead: USDA Hiring Reform Workgroup
  Members: HR representatives from mission areas/components

Action Steps				
Actions to be Taken	**Key Deliverables/Output**	**Start Date/ End Date**	**Responsible Party (Parties)**	**Budget, Resources, and Approvals Needed**
Schedule session with OPM Mobile Assistance Team (MAT) to educate HR staffs and to assist in identifying options (including multi-phased approaches) for assessing applicants, particularly when cover letter and traditional resumes will be accepted.	Announce date of session and require mission area attendance/participation.	10/2010	Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) Policy Division and OPM	
Develop USDA policy/guidance that eliminates any requirement for applicants to provide essay or narrative responses to demonstrate their possession of a KSA/competency. Guidance includes sample instructions and language for job announcement template.	Draft guidance on the elimination of KSA's is shared with components for review and comment. Issue guidance to components.	9/2010 10/2010	OHRM Policy Division and Hiring Reform Workgroup	
Components identify bargaining needs to implement this initiative.	Bargaining obligations are satisfied.	10/2010 until completion	Mission area labor relations staffs	
Communicate initiative to HR staffs, employees, and hiring managers, including what changes they should expect and how the job application process will change.	Publication of information on USDA/OHRM website to convey information about hiring reform initiatives and upcoming changes in application/assessment processes.	10/2010	OHRM Policy Division and Hiring Reform Workgroup	

Components modify job announcements to eliminate requirement for KSA essays/narrative responses, and to provide instructions to applicants on how they will be assessed.	Job announcements with clear, revised instructions about how applicants will be assessed.	11/2010	Mission Areas	
Components modify occupational questionnaires so that narrative responses are not required in the initial application process.	Occupational questionnaires used in the initial application process do not require completion of narrative responses.	11/2010	Mission Areas	
Identify and evaluate options for effectively assessing applicants using a multi-phased approach with less information from applicants at the initial stage of the application process.	Components have begun using multi-phased assessment approaches to facilitate the assessment process, as needed.	09/2010 to 6/2011	Hiring Reform Work group and Mission Areas	
Develop template and schedule for progress reporting. Require that components submit an initial progress report by end of first quarter, FY 2011.	Each mission area submits progress reports to advise OHRM of implementation status and preliminary results.	11/2010 to 12/2010	Hiring Reform Work group and Mission Areas	

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Hiring Reform Initiative: 2. Allow individuals to apply with resume and cover letter in any format.	Date: Revised 09-09-10

Describe the barrier, problem, or deficiency being addressed:

Resumes and cover letters may not provide the necessary information to determine an applicant's basic eligibility.

Describe what is causing the barrier/problem (i.e., What is the root cause?):
- Agencies must ensure that candidates who are referred and hired meet minimum qualifications and basic eligibility requirements.
- Past reliance on standard information that was required in Federal resumes, which was sufficient to establish basic eligibility and assess qualifications.

Define success or the desired outcome upon completion of action steps below:
- Automated systems enable applicants to apply using resume and cover letter in any format.
- An efficient process is in place for assessing qualifications and eligibility at the initial stage of the application process, such as through use of a brief questionnaire. Revised process enables HR staffs to make accurate qualifications determinations.
- Job announcements provide clear instructions describing how applicants' eligibility and qualifications will be assessed.
- HR staffs are adequately trained on revised application process. In addition, changes to application process are communicated to hiring managers and employees.
- Revised application process does not increase the time it takes to fill positions, or result in a considerable increase in the number of applicants who are screened out.
- HR staffs that use a multi-phase assessment process fill vacancies in an average of 80 days.

Primary Action Planning Team
 Lead: OHRM Policy Division and USDA Hiring Reform Workgroup

Action Steps				
Actions to be Taken	**Key Deliverables/Output**	**Start Date/ End Date**	**Responsible Party (Parties)**	**Budget, Resources, and Approvals Needed**
Schedule OPM Mobile Assistance Team (MAT) to instruct HR staffs on the new requirements and on ways to assess qualifications without the information previously provided in Federal-style resumes.	MAT session is scheduled for USDA HR staffs. Mission area representatives are required to attend.	09/2010 to 10/2010	OHRM Policy Division and OPM	
Develop USDA policy/guidance that provides specific information on the requirements to allow individuals to apply with cover letters and resumes in any format.	Policy/guidance published that outlines specific requirements of this initiative.	09/2010 to 10/2010	OHRM Policy Division and Mission Areas	
Components identify bargaining needs to implement this initiative.	Bargaining obligations are satisfied.	10/2010 until completion	Mission area labor relations staffs	
Develop communication strategy and information to facilitate acceptance and understanding by HR staffs, hiring managers, and employees through various means, such as newsletters, communications from leadership, USDA website.	Communications to publicize initiative and educate managers, employees, and HR staffs published or disseminated throughout USDA.	11/2010	OHRM	
Components modify job announcements to eliminate requirement for Federal resume, and to provide instructions to applicants on how to apply and how they will be assessed.	Job announcements with clear, revised instructions describing how to apply and how applicants will be assessed.	11/2010	Mission Areas	

2010 Hiring Reform Action Plan	
Hiring Reform Initiative: 3. Use category rating	**Date:** Revised 09-09-10

Describe the barrier, problem, or deficiency being addressed:
- USDA does not have a Department-wide category rating policy in place.
- Lack of clear information from OPM on translating numerical scores into valid, defensible categories from which selection can be made, including for positions utilizing the ACWA assessment.
- HR staffs and hiring managers must be trained on the category rating approach.

Describe what is causing the barrier/problem (i.e., What is the root cause?):
Until now category rating was optional and not widely used in USDA.

Define success or the desired outcome upon completion of applied tasks:
- USDA's category rating policy is published and successfully implemented in all components.
- Training is provided to HR staffs and managers about the category rating process. Training plan and materials are routinely provided to new managers and those who need a refresher.
- Management Satisfaction Survey results indicate an increase in managers' satisfaction with the number and quality of candidates referred after implementation.

Primary Action Planning Team
  Lead: USDA Hiring Reform Workgroup Leader
  Members: Mission Area Employment Policy contacts

Action Steps				
Actions to be Taken	**Key Deliverables/Output**	**Start Date/ End Date**	**Responsible Party (Parties)**	**Budget, Resources, and Approvals Needed**
Draft USDA-wide category rating policy. Send to components for review and comment.	USDA Category rating policy finalized.	06/2010 to 10/2010	OHRM Policy Division	
Schedule Mobile Assistance Team (MAT) to train HR staffs on category rating. Address specific questions about using category rating for standing registers and for ACWA-covered positions.	HR staffs attend MAT session or OPM workshops on category rating.	09/2010 to 10/2010	OHRM Policy Division	
USDA Hiring Reform workgroup develops presentation and training/educational materials on	Category Rating training/educational materials developed and shared with	09/2010 to 11/2010	Hiring Reform	

category rating that can be implemented USDA-wide to training managers, HR staffs, and employees.	mission areas. Mission areas edit, as needed, and deliver training within their organizations.		Workgroup and Mission Areas HR staffs	
Components make adjustments to hiring systems to assess and refer candidates using category rating.	Components' hiring systems support category rating approach.	10/2010 to 11/2010	Mission Area HR staffs	
Components identify bargaining needs to implement category rating.	Bargaining obligations are satisfied.	10/2010 until completion	Mission area labor relations staffs	
Components deliver training to hiring managers on the use of category rating.	Hiring managers trained.	10/2010 to 11/2011	Mission Area HR staffs	
Components begin using category rating.	At a minimum, category rating implemented for all non-bargaining unit positions.	11/2010	Mission Area HR staffs	

2010 Hiring Reform Action Plan

Hiring Reform Initiative:	Date:
4. Ensure manager responsibility and accountability for hiring through full involvement in the hiring process, including planning current and future work force requirements, identifying the skills required for the job, and engaging actively in the recruitment and interviewing process. In addition, make managers accountable for hiring highly qualified employees and supporting their successful transition into the Federal service, beginning with the first performance cycle starting after November 1, 2010.	Revised 09-09-10

Describe the barrier, problem, or deficiency being addressed:

The hiring process is often viewed as a human resources function, and the degree of management involvement varies by organization. Managers' roles must be defined, clarified, or reinforced in all USDA organizations.

Describe what is causing the barrier/problem (i.e., What is the root cause?):

Inconsistent and/or insufficient resources (e.g., time, tools, personnel) dedicated to continuing education for managers about their full involvement in the hiring process, including work force planning, recruitment, job analysis, development of assessment instruments, interviewing/selection, onboarding/orientation, and continuous improvement of the hiring process.

Define success or the desired outcome upon completion of applied tasks:

Core competencies are identified and communicated for hiring managers about their role in the work force planning, recruitment, hiring, and onboarding processes. HR specialists and managers jointly participate in the recruitment and hiring processes with a mutual understanding of their respective roles. Full implementation of educational efforts results in the selection of quality candidates within the 80 day timeframe, greater management satisfaction with the quality of candidates referred and selected, and the effective transition of new employees into the USDA work force.

Primary Action Planning Team
 Lead: USDA Hiring Reform Workgroup Leader
 Members: Workgroup members, Selected agency representatives, OHRM staff from policy, recruitment, and the Virtual University

Action Steps				
Actions to be Taken	**Key Deliverables/Output**	**Start Date/ End Date**	**Responsible Party (Parties)**	**Budget, Resources, and Approvals Needed**
Develop a USDA website to include hiring tools for managers, including such topics as work force planning, hiring flexibilities, steps in the hiring process, available incentives and options; links to appropriate sites, and information about the hiring reform initiatives and the hiring manager's role in the hiring process.	Website launched.	10/2010 to 11/2011	OHRM, OCIO, Agency Reps	Requires interdisciplinary working group from HQ and components
Develop core competencies for all USDA managers that outline "what a hiring manager needs to know" about the hiring process. Components may supplement these core competencies with additional requirements to meet their own organizational needs and objectives.	Core competencies published on USDA website.	10/2010		
Issue policy/guidance that requires inclusion of a critical performance element that holds supervisors responsible for recruiting, hiring, and successfully transitioning new employees into the Federal service. Provide sample language that can be incorporated into existing performance standards.	Requirement published and implemented within components.	09/2010 to 11/2010	OHRM and Mission Areas	

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Hiring Reform Initiative:	Date:
5. Improve the quality and speed of hiring by: (i) reducing the time it takes to hire mission-critical and commonly filled positions; (ii) measuring the quality and speed of the hiring process; (iii) analyzing the causes of agency hiring problems and actions that will be taken to reduce them; (iv) providing every agency hiring manager training on effective, efficient, and timely ways to recruit and hire well-qualified individuals.	Revised 09-09-10

Describe the barrier, problem, or deficiency being addressed:
- Some components need additional automated solutions (such as position description libraries, automated assessment processes, and tracking tools) that would facilitate the hiring process.
- Low response to Hiring Management Satisfaction Survey about the hiring process resulted in insufficient data to evaluate satisfaction with the hiring process.
- Inconsistent data about the timeliness of the hiring process -- Not all components are tracking time-to-hire; or dates tracked are not consistent throughout USDA.

Describe what is causing the barrier/problem (i.e., What is the root cause?):
- Lack of standardized tools available USDA-wide, such as position description libraries, job announcement templates, assessment question libraries, etc.
- Not all components require completion of the Management Satisfaction Survey with each hiring certificate.
- Lack of specific direction on requirement to track time-to-hire, and the beginning and ending dates that should be used.

Define success or the desired outcome upon completion of applied tasks:
All components are tracking time-to-hire using the same beginning and ending dates.   Hiring actions USDA-wide are completed within an average of 80 days.   Management Satisfaction Survey indicates an increase in satisfaction with the quality of the applicants referred and hired.

Primary Action Planning Team
 Lead: USDA Hiring Reform Workgroup Leader
 Members: Agency HR specialists; Virtual University representative and Policy representative, Enterprise Systems representative

Action Steps				
Actions to be Taken	**Key Deliverables/Output**	**Start Date/ End Date**	**Responsible Party (Parties)**	**Budget, Resources, and Approvals Needed**
Continue progress on evaluating and procuring a single technology system for USDA.	Periodic reports that provide technology status updates. Last report issued 09/2010.	01/2010 to 06/2011	OHRM – Enterprise Systems Division; "One USDA" Project work group	
Develop tools such as job accouncement templates, position description libraries, and assessment instruments.	Tools are available for use throughout USDA.	8/2010 to 11/2010	OHRM, Agency Reps	
Integrate existing USDA position management and workforce management policies to emphasize pre-hiring planning.	Policy published.	07/2010 to 11/2010	OHRM	
Review USDA Merit Promotion Plan and identify provisions that may slow down the hiring process. Revise Merit Promotion Plan to include alternatives that could improve timeliness, such as the use of a categorical approach to rate and refer candidates.	Publish an interim policy with a subsequent new Merit Promotion Plan	11/2010 to 02/2011 (interim) 05/2011 (final plan)	OHRM Policy Division and Mission Area representatives	
Issue instruction requiring components to track time-to-hire, including appropriate "from/to" dates and provide sample spreadsheet to facilitate implementation for all components.	Publish policy/instructions on tracking time-to-hire.	10/2010 to 11/2010	OHRM Policy Division and HR Planning/Strategy Divisions, with input from work groups and HR staffs in components.	
USDA requires completion of the Management Satisfaction Survey with each hiring certificate to ensure sufficient data from which to evaluate managers' satisfaction with the hiring process.	Publish Department-wide instructions on use of Management Survey	10/2010 to 11/2010	HR Policy Board and HR Planning/Strategy Divisions, with input from work groups and hiring	

			managers in components.	

2010 Hiring Reform Action Plan

Hiring Reform Initiative: 6. Notify applicants about their status	Date: Revised 09-09-10

Describe the barrier, problem, or deficiency being addressed:

Not all components are notifying applicants about their status at the four required stages in the hiring process.

Describe what is causing the barrier/problem (i.e., What is the root cause?):

Lack of specific guidance published to "institutionalize" requirement so that all components consistently comply.

Define success or the desired outcome upon completion of applied tasks:

All components report that they are notifying applicants about their status at the four key stages of the hiring process. Future accountability reviews confirm compliance.

Primary Action Planning Team
  Lead: USDA Hiring Reform Workgroup Leader
  Members: HR representatives

Action Steps				
Actions to be Taken	**Key Deliverables/Output**	**Start Date/ End Date**	**Responsible Party (Parties)**	**Budget, Resources, and Approvals Needed**
Issue policy/instruction that directs components to notify applicants at the four key stages in the hiring process: (1) application received; (2) applicant eligible (or not); (3) application referred to the selecting official (or not); (4) applicant selected (or not). Policy establishes appropriate timeframes for applicant notification.	Policy/instruction issued. Applicants receive timely notification about their status.	10/2010 to 11/2010 11/2010	OHRM Policy Division with input from components Mission Areas	
Review accountability reports to monitor compliance with instructions and this initiative.	Effective evaluation process in place to assess progress.	12/2010	OHRM Planning and	

Modify instruction or re-issue as needed.			Accountability Division and Policy Division	